

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 5

INTRODUCED BY G. ROUSH

BY REQUEST OF THE STATE ADMINISTRATION, PUBLIC RETIREMENT SYSTEMS, AND VETERANS'

AFFAIRS INTERIM COMMITTEE

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA REQUESTING A LEGISLATIVE STUDY OF CERTAIN VETERANS' ISSUES; URGING THE APPROPRIATE INTERIM COMMITTEE TO INCLUDE VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS IN THE STUDY PROCESS; REQUESTING STAFF SUPPORT; AND REQUESTING A REPORT OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

WHEREAS, Montana is home to more than 100,000 veterans potentially eligible for federal benefits, which ranks Montana 10th in the number of veterans per capita; and

WHEREAS, resource allocation decisions limit the funding available to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Montana health care system and require local administrators to set priorities; and

WHEREAS, the Montana Legislature appropriates public funds for programs that encompass services to Montana's veterans and also sets priorities; and

WHEREAS, some resource allocation decisions may inadvertently shift costs to other programs; and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee on Military and Veterans' Affairs has found that veteran participation in discussions about fiscal and policy priorities is not only desirable for proper consideration of veterans' concerns but essential to bridging the gulf between service providers and veterans whose disabilities make it difficult for them to access those services; and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee on Military and Veterans' Affairs has found that federal grant money may be available to help coordinate federal, state, and local services and to maximize the effective use of current resources; and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee on Military and Veterans' Affairs has found that the release of VA medical records to the Federal Bureau of Investigation is a matter of concern; and

WHEREAS, twice as many veterans as nonveterans experience homelessness at some time during the course of a year and, because of complex and overlapping needs, a broader range of service

1 coordination, advocacy, and intervention is required; and

2 WHEREAS, the Subcommittee on Military and Veterans' Affairs has found that an in-depth and
3 systematic legislative examination of these issues is desirable.

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5 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
6 STATE OF MONTANA:

7 That the Legislative Council be requested to designate an appropriate interim committee pursuant
8 to section 5-5-217, MCA, to:

9 (1) identify how regional priorities are set and local resource allocation decisions are made by the
10 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the VA Montana health care system;

11 (2) consider the extent to which certain resource allocation decisions may shift costs and explore
12 what actions could be taken to assess and mitigate unintended consequences;

13 (3) explore how the concerns of Montana's veterans can best be represented when fiscal and
14 policy priorities are set;

15 (4) stay informed about whether veterans are being denied rights as a result of VA medical records
16 being released to the Federal Bureau of Investigation;

17 (5) explore options for establishing a statewide homeless veterans' coordinator, a veterans'
18 ombudsman, or other veterans' program to coordinate veteran-related services and identify the state
19 agency under which the coordinator, ombudsman, or other program should be established;

20 (6) explore options for designing a grant program to capture available federal funds to support
21 Montana's veterans' services;

22 (7) examine the state statutory definitions of "veteran" in context with more recent U.S. military
23 operations, such as the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo; and

24 (8) study other emerging issues relevant to veterans' needs.

25 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in order to facilitate a broad-based study process, the interim
26 committee be encouraged to seek out and welcome the participation of representatives of Congressionally
27 chartered and recognized veterans' service organizations.

28 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Montana Veterans'
29 Affairs Division, the Montana Department of Military Affairs, the Montana Department of Public Health and
30 Human Services, and other appropriate public and private entities be urged to cooperate with and

1 participate in this study process.

2 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the interim committee receive legislative staff support not only
3 from the Legislative Services Division, but also from the Legislative Audit and Legislative Fiscal Divisions;
4 that legislative staff be encouraged to interface with the staff of Montana's Congressional Delegation as
5 appropriate; and that the interim committee report its findings, conclusions, and any recommended
6 legislation to the 58th Legislature and to Montana's Congressional Delegation.

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